

Brucellosis Coordination Team Meeting
August 22, 2005
Pinedale, Wyoming

Team Members Present:

Frank Galey, Cathy Purves, Bob Wharff, Terry Cleveland, Bill Williams, Scott Werbelow, Albert Sommers, Brent Larson, Dwayne Oldham, Bret Combs, Rob Hendry, Terry Kreeger, Dave Roberts, John Keck, Shawn Madden, Ken Mills, Terry Pollard, Jamie Snow, John Hines, Monte Olsen, John Etchepare, Erika Olsen and Joel Bousman.

Introduction:

Frank Galey began the meeting with some introductory and housekeeping remarks.

USDA Program Review:

Dr. Dwayne Oldham discussed the recent USDA-APHIS program review. The review team traveled through the state and reviewed the state's Brucellosis program. Dr. Oldham noted that the review team was pleased with the BMAP process and the test and remove program. The team also noted the need for herd management plans handled on an individual basis. The team also encouraged adult vaccination and the completion of the epidemiology on the Jackson Brucellosis case. The team strongly recommended against split status, for dealer registration, for continued surveillance testing after Wyoming regains free status, for continued wildlife program advances after free status is regained and for new equipment for the Wyoming State Veterinary Lab. According to Dr. Oldham, Wyoming, in conjunction with USDA-APHIS, will petition to regain free status in December.

The Team then asked questions about the process to regain free status, the timeline and area for continued testing, testing for the epidemiology on the Jackson case and the process to move ahead with such testing prior to the December free-status petition process, the denial of access to Elk Refuge bison for testing and dealer licensing and registration. On the issue of dealer registration, Monte Olsen counseled that the process commence soon, as the Legislature has had past difficulties with similar legislation providing for registration. John Hines suggested that Dr. Oldham work with the Agriculture Committee to have them sponsor any bill dealing with registration. John Etchepare suggested that prior to any movement on the registration issue, that whoever is going to bring about such a bill must get the agriculture groups together and offer a cogent definition of what constitutes a "dealer." Dr. Oldham introduced Tim O'Neill who will be working to create the herd management plans. Albert Sommers asked how Dr. Oldham and APHIS will determine which producers would need to develop a herd plan. Bret Combs suggested that all the herds in the GYA would be subject to such planning, with a great degree of variety in the content of the plans. The priority would be the "high risk" herds.

Albert Sommers asked if "intent to complete" the herd plans was sufficient to comply with review. Dr. Combs suggested that the completion of several initial plans will show that the intent is there, which will weigh heavy in the process in favor of regaining free

status. Combs also noted that herd plans have been started and in most cases finished in those herds in the initial infected herds. Shawn Madden asked whether all must be completed before APHIS considers our giving back free status. Dr. Combs indicated that he did not know, but that intent would likely “count for something.” Albert Sommers asked at what point APHIS or the State Veterinarian would come out with a surveillance plan. Dr. Oldham suggested and determination on surveillance plans would come after the review team’s report and would be subject to public comment.

Public Information and Education Update:

Eric Keszler distributed a handout describing the public information program for the distribution of Brucellosis-related education and information, which was developed through an interagency process. The campaign will consist, in part, of an increased web presence, a media kit, a PowerPoint presentation, CDs for media, video for media, a public opinion survey and a fact sheet on Brucellosis. The campaign has included an op-ed and will include releases of additional information in Game and Fish Department and other publications, website updates and panel discussions.

Rob Hendry asked who would pay for the strategy. Mr. Keszler suggested that many of the strategies were cost neutral, but where cost does enter the equation, the agencies will share the costs.

Brucellosis Symposium Update:

Frank Galey updated the Team on the Symposium that took place in Laramie last week. The Symposium highlighted the need for and potential solutions in the realm of research; specifically vaccine, vaccine delivery and diagnostic tool research. The USAHA, together with the Ruckelshaus Institute, sponsored the meeting. 40-50 scientists attended the meeting with the focus of developing a roadmap to identify research and infrastructure needs (network of researchers to act as clearinghouse, labs, select agent difficulties, sharing of reagents, other scientific information about the Brucellosis bacteria, funding, coordination, etc.). The Symposium is going to suggest a Center for Brucellosis research for funding in Congress. Resources, facilities and select agent discussions permeated the Symposium and will be the centerpiece of the roadmap coming from the Symposium.

Joel Bousman was encouraged by his discussions with those from other countries who, in the absence of some relaxation of the regulatory constraints in the US, offered to assist in and potentially expedite needed research. The importance of such collaboration was underscored by the lack of movement in USDA, HHS and Homeland Security on the select agent issue.

Department of Health Seroprevalence Study:

Dr. Snow updated the Team on a seroprevalence study in high risk human populations (hunters, ranchers, Game and Fish personnel, veterinarians, etc.), which the Department of Health is conducting, pursuant to Brucellosis Team recommendations. The study is meant to identify risks and hopefully lead to efforts to mitigate those risks.

BMAP Update:

Brandon Scurlock updated the Team regarding the development of the BMAP process. Scurlock and the Department are working on the development of the Fall Creek BMAP, following the completion of the Muddy Creek/ Pinedale Elk Herd BMAP. Scurlock described the new elk fence, which was developed during the Muddy Creek/Pinedale Elk Herd BMAP. According to Scurlock, the fence strategy was developed in conjunction with Hall Sawyer, especially concerning essential migration routes. The fence construction should be started next year. Joel Bousman indicated that the producers in the area feel that more fence is warranted, but that at present, they are pleased with the developments related to the construction of the proposed fence.

Terry Cleveland indicated that the Game and Fish will be requesting additional Veterinary Services funding through the Legislature this coming Session, with consideration of the need to speed up the remaining BMAP's development. Cleveland then gave an update on the progress made on the development of the GYIBC MOU. Terry Cleveland and Terry Kreeger updated the Team on the timeline for testing elk and bison to complete the epidemiology in the Jackson case. The elk will likely be tested sometime in mid-January and February. Hunter harvest of elk, which was suggested, practically cannot be employed in such testing. The bison serology will come with the bison hunt, which will be subject to the completion of the Elk/Bison EIS.

Elk/Bison EIS:

Rob Hendry asked that the Team discuss the Elk/Bison EIS, which is currently out for comment, and questioned whether the Team had a particular Alternative, which it would choose to advocate. Hendry offered his suggestion that whatever alternative is chosen, management will take some "working of the animals," which narrows the choices to Alternatives 4, 5 and 6. Galey suggested that he was uncomfortable with the Team taking a position on document without everyone having a chance to read the text.

Progress on Recommendations:

Representative Olsen suggested that dealer licensure will be a central issue in the upcoming Session. Olsen also noted that continued and increased education of Legislators is critical, with the State Veterinarian and Frank Galey noted as important in that effort. Olsen highlighted the importance of the Livestock Board budget and ensuring enough money for surveillance, with the question being, "How much of the appropriated funds was used for Brucellosis surveillance?" The issue of the organization and funding of the Brand Inspection Program was also discussed, as the need for movement in the coming legislative session. Olsen also asked Dr. Oldham whether the Livestock Board will need additional funding to complete the necessary herd plans. Relative to the Game and Fish Department, Olsen assumed that continued funding for veterinary services would be requested. Terry Cleveland confirmed Olsen's assumption. Cleveland said that the Department's estimates for an elk trap at the Muddy Creek feedground were more than adequate to cover the costs of construction. The issue of compensation of producers for quarantine was also mentioned. Senator Hines added several comments indicating his desire for all agencies that have received funding from Brucellosis during the past session to give him a white paper on what those funds were and what they were used for. He also

requested a copy of all agency budgets, as they are presented to the Governor, showing budget requests for Brucellosis for the coming biennium. The reports were requested sometime prior to December 1. Senator Hines asked whether the testing funds would come from the Livestock Board again. According to Frank Galey, the answer is yes, a request had gone to Livestock Board.

Terry Cleveland noted that the Department will be meeting with the Travel, Recreation and Wildlife Committee relative to the recommendation to prohibit the private feeding of animals. Whether the Committee will craft a committee bill is in question, although Monte Olsen suggested that if the effort failed, he would suggest waiting until the General Session to bring about such legislation. Joel Bousman asked who was going to pay for blood work and vaccination associated with the herd management plans. Dr. Oldham offered that in his budget, he had left it open that the funds used for testing could also be used for adult vaccination. Albert Sommers asked about those other items that may be required for the herd management plans and how they would be funded. Cleveland indicated that neither he nor Dr. Oldham knew where those funds would come from. Oldham added that in discussions with the Legislature, Governor and agricultural groups, the payment of such expenses by the government may be questionable, although it may be feasible through the Wildlife Trust Board. John Etchepare suggested that producers and the Department will get nothing if we go at this piecemeal. All affected producers must get together. Senator Hines mentioned that the Legislature would not look favorably on a broad expansion in programs. The Legislature will be asking that whatever is funded helps us regain our free status and that anything for “individuals,” could face significant challenges. Monte Olsen noted that he had already faced some challenges to Brucellosis funding in the House of Representatives and that such funding could face some difficulty in the coming Session. Frank Galey indicated that mid-November, the Executive Committee would get into contact with Senator Hines and Representative Olsen to discuss the upcoming Session.

Feedground Phase-Out:

Lloyd Dorsey and Franz Camenzind addressed the group relative to a pilot feedground phase-out proposal, which was presented earlier this year and answered questions from Team. Camenzind noted his concerns over bovine TB and CWD, relative to feeding. He suggested that the Team’s action on the environmental groups’ proposal is needed as soon as possible to allow the pilot project to move ahead. Lloyd Dorsey then presented a PowerPoint presentation relative to the pilot project, noting the potential impacts of wolves, snowpack conditions and available forage on the project and elk herd numbers. Dorsey described the administrative and funding needs relative to the pilot project. Camenzind closed the presentation with a request for the Team to make a recommendation to the Governor to bring the project to fruition.

The Team asked about the impacts of wolves, impacts of snow crusting and causes of past mass starvation events on the project. The Team also asked questions about the historical use by cattle and forage availability in the Gros Ventre. Terry Cleveland asked whether the pilot project could be effectively implemented without the absolute buy-in of all affected landowners. Dorsey and Camenzind suggested that such implementation

could be difficult, but that the pilot project, in the end, was the best for the state. The Team also questioned several of the assumptions used to develop the pilot project (i.e. snow water equivalent and movement) and the impacts of the decisions made through the Elk/Bison EIS on the proposed pilot.

The Team then broke into Team discussion about the pilot project. Monte Olsen asked, as a matter of procedure, what would have to be done to bring about the pilot project. Terry Cleveland stated that the proposal would have to go to the Game and Fish Commission for approval. Olsen followed up and asked if the Commission, then, was the appropriate venue. Cleveland offered that the Commission would be hesitant to make a recommendation on feedgrounds without some buy-in from the Brucellosis Team. Bill Williams followed by stating that the Commission would want some recommendation from the Team prior to taking some action. Albert Sommers asked Glen Taylor whether he would be willing to elk-proof fence off his entire operation to prevent commingling after the pilot project. Mr. Taylor said that he would not. Joel Bousman asked Mr. Taylor what kind of situation would be created if the feedgrounds were eliminated and a large storm-event came in. Taylor suggested that a mass starvation (1/3 of elk) would have occurred – that if the elk are not taken care of before the storm event, they will die off. Ken Mills suggested that the Commission and Department may be the best venue to dissect this proposal for its consideration, as the BMAP process allows consideration of feedground closure. Mills suggested that the BMAP process would be the best place for this discussion. Terry Cleveland noted that the BMAP process for the Gros Ventre will not be commenced until 2006 or 2007. The pilot is being requested to run concurrent with the test and remove proposal, which will not match with the test and remove pilot as contemplated in the pilot feedground closure. Albert Sommers stated his concern for the pilot project and discussed his opposition to the proposal. He also mentioned his concern that the allotments (grazing) might be converted to winter range and be taken out of livestock production. Rob Hendry suggested that the BMAP process was the most appropriate venue, as past commenters had offered, for discussion of the pilot closure. He also noted that the Team do the test and remove first and then consider the phase out. Cathy Purves noted her concern for the Elk Refuge management questions that loom, especially as they relate to the pilot closure. Joel Bousman suggested that the pilot closure does not contemplate cleaning up the herd prior to closure. He also noted that the BMAP process is the proper course and process to handle pilot projects such as the feedground closure pilot. Dr. Mills suggested that the decisions on the Refuge and the decisions related to closure be contemplated conjunctively, which is most appropriate in 2006 or 2007 during the BMAP development process, which will then be underway. Terry Pollard expressed his opposition to the project and exhorted the Team to stay true to the process established through the Team to handle such suggestions (BMAP process).

Pilot Program for Test and Slaughter:

Dr. Kreeger introduced the proposed test and slaughter program. The pilot will take place on the Muddy Creek feedground in early 2006. All female elk will be blood sampled and multiple diagnostic tests will be conducted overnight in Pinedale. Elk considered likely to be infected with *Brucella* will be slaughtered. The elk will be sent to the USDA processing facility in Idaho, with the meat to be donated. Trapping will be

repeated after several days “rest” in order to maximize the number of females caught. Captured elk will not be vaccinated in order to reduce the number of false positives and to more accurately evaluate the efficacy of the test and slaughter efforts. A similar system is used in Idaho. Four tests will be run in Pinedale to confirm the results.

Potential problems were noted to be: not catching enough cows, unanticipated trap design flaws, elk leaving the feedground, human intervention and wrecks (large number of elk dying due to poor trap design, etc.). Dr. Mills noted that Dr. Regan with APHIS suggested a test and slaughter with a vaccination program is the best course, with this proposal not incorporating the vaccination program. Dr. Kreeger suggested that such a proposal was the will of the Team. Rob Hendry noted his approval, but offered some design enhancements to increase the catch rate above 80%. Shawn Madden underscored the importance of not vaccinating the caught elk, as his experience with domestic cattle demonstrates that suspects abound. Bob Wharff asked if a follow-up test on slaughtered animals will be conducted to validate the positive tests. Kreeger indicated that graduate students would be employed to harvest the organs for confirmatory testing. Cathy Purves asked what the estimate was for total slaughtered elk. Kreeger suggested that less than 100 animals would be taken in the first year, with reduced numbers each year forward. Terry Cleveland noted the process for what will happen following the slaughter, with the elk being returned to the state for distribution.

Public Comment:

Don Warner: Veterinarian from Laurel, Montana with a family ranch in Wyoming. Believes that the biggest single problem with Brucellosis in GYA is feedgrounds. The process is unnatural and only perpetuates the disease. The problem will potentially come back to bite us with CWD, TB, etc. The test and slaughter proposal is not the best course, other than we might gain some data. The true solution is the closure of feedgrounds.

Lloyd Dorsey: Expressed his thanks to the Team for listening to the pilot feedground closure. He also noted that the feedground closure questions presented by the Team were answered, which answers are available to the Team. The timing issue related to the pilot closure is essential, with the need for movement being immediate.

Franz Camenzind: Offered no additional comments.

Tony Legory: Mr. Legory has a ranch in the upper Gros Ventre. He is against closing feedgrounds without additional study, especially concerning the availability of vegetation, abundance of snow and further study. Legory also expressed concern for other species that utilize the available forage in the Gros Ventre, namely the moose, in the event the elk are moved from the feedgrounds. He exhorted that the Gros Ventre not be used for an experiment.

Arman Acree: Mr. Acree is a member of the Wyoming Wildlife Federation. Acree noted his appreciation for details about the test and slaughter and asked for additional information to be disseminated when the Department has it available.

Glen Taylor: Mr. Taylor started his discussion by reading a letter from his sister, Deon Robinson, opposing feedground closure in the Gros Ventre. He then filled in his discussion recounting his personal experiences with forage production, cattle/elk forage competition and feeding. He also noted the importance of being able to see elk, rather than kill them.

Roger Lasson: Mr. Lasson is the ranch manager in the Gros Ventre. Mr. Dorsey and Dr. Camenzind have not contacted he or the owner of his operation, and thus, he questions the factual support for the other provisions of the pilot closure.

Jim Magagna: Mr. Magagna thanked the Team for its effort and dedication. He asked that the Team bring together the requests into a cogent proposal to make a prepared case to the Legislature for funding. Regarding the pilot closure, he questioned whether the closure could be labeled a “pilot,” as there are irreversible impacts of the proposal. He noted that, on behalf of the Wyoming Stock Growers Association, he was opposed to the pilot feedground closure.

David Haire: Mr. Haire expressed his opposition, together with the owner of the ranch he manages, to the pilot feedground closure.

Robert Richards: Mr. Richards offered no comment.

Evonne Cramer: Ms. Cramer operates land in the upper Gros Ventre. The owners of the land are opposed to the pilot feedground closure, as is Ms. Cramer. She expressed her support for other pilots, but not for feedground closure.

Dr. Galey asked whether there was funding or a proposal to allow for funding for the group to continue to meet. Ryan Lance mentioned that he did not know. Representative Olsen suggested that the directors and legislators meet, with others invited, to follow the recommendations. Cathy Purves suggested that the Team be given updates, especially regarding the pilot test and remove. Rob Hendry stated that he desired to meet face to face, to support the agencies as they implement the recommendations of the Team – specifically the Game and Fish. Terry Cleveland noted that updates will always be provided through the Department relative to actions on the Team’s recommendations. Albert Sommers suggested that the Team continue to meet, to respond to successes and failures in the implementation of various recommendations. Dr. Williams mentioned that he would prefer to meet annually to go over the results to make recommendations based on the monitoring and studies that have been commenced.

Dr. Galey expressed his thanks to the Team and certain members of the public for following the process. The Team then adjourned.